

Superintendent News

WARRICK COUNTY SCHOOL CORPORATION
ADMINISTRATION CENTER

This Edition:

State Educational Reform
Measures Unproven

NCLB No Longer Applies
to Indiana Schools

WCSC Working Hard to Excel in Tough Times

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Public Education is undergoing numerous changes, and while some of these changes will have positive impacts on schools and student learning, several will not. State leadership is all about reforms these days. Whether those reforms are research-based and have statistical data to support their effectiveness, does not seem to matter much. Unfortunately, many of the reforms enacted by the state of Indiana lack data to support the mission of improving student learning and making schools more effective. One example is merit pay. Daniel Pink, a renowned author and speaker, cited the research of four prominent economists in his book entitled *Drive*. The research concluded that merit pay only works if the task involves motorized skills. This includes activities on an assembly line in which workers are paid by how many “widgets” they can manipulate in a day. In addition, their research actually showed that when merit pay is implemented in tasks that call for cognitive skills, such as teaching, it actually led to poorer performance. Given this research, one has to wonder why Indiana is mandating merit pay for teachers beginning in 2013-2014. Fact is, there is no evidence that merit pay for teachers has ever improved student or school performance. The proliferation of charter schools is another reform near and dear to the hearts of educational leaders in Indianapolis. Once again, the data does not back up their rhetoric that charter schools, or competition, will improve student learning. While it is true that some charter schools are doing well, it is also true that many are doing very poorly. Research has generally shown that charter schools are not performing better than traditional public schools.

Don't misunderstand. I believe schools must continue to improve the educational services we provide students. I simply do not believe state mandates and old, unproven reforms are the way to accomplish this goal. Instead, educators must continue to raise the bar and find new ways to engage students. We need to continue our efforts to incorporate technology into the classroom. We need to encourage students to be problem-solvers, not just test-takers; provide students with experiences that require them to think outside of the box; instill a true love and passion for reading and academia in our students; encourage students to use their imagination to develop better ways of doing things or inventing products that will improve our way of life; and encourage and support teachers that take chances with lesson plans that actively engage and push students to excel and develop the confidence and skills necessary to be productive members of our society. These are the types of things WCSC is focusing on. To be clear, I believe improvements in public education and student performance are rooted in local control. I know parents, teachers, business leaders, the school board, and the students of Warrick County are much better equipped to make decisions regarding our children's education than all the politicians in Indianapolis. Instead of mandating “one-size-fits-all” reforms, our leaders and legislators need to fix schools that are performing poorly. They need to allow high performing schools, like the WCSC, to continue our work of educating and inspiring students to achieve at their highest possible level. To be fair, not all changes to public education have been misguided. The recent announcement that Indiana was one of ten states granted a waiver from federal accountability guidelines known as No Child Left Behind, is a positive change. Beginning in 2012-1013, PL 221, Indiana's accountability program, will be the only accountability measure applied to Indiana schools. For many years we were held accountable under both measures. Many times results were mixed as schools performed well under PL 221 and poorly on NCLB. These conflicting results left parents and the public thoroughly confused as to how schools were actually performing. PL 221 is far from perfect, but it is a substantial improvement over NCLB and should eliminate much of this confusion.

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